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Session three: Improving the policy and funding frameworks for schooling

The educational/social framework

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Introduction

For many Australian children, schooldays bring much enlightenment and enjoyment. With well-qualified, able and caring teachers in classrooms across the country, they learn ways of thinking about the world and learning to act in it that will sustain them through life. The challenge facing governments is to provide the conditions where this can be the reality for all our children.

Fortunately, governments have a wealth of evidence to guide them in framing their policies and related funding decisions, and in setting their priorities; in order to set these conditions for teachers and students to engage in the subtle and complex process of teaching and learning.

We know, for example, that the most effective indicator of student achievement – an individual child achieving his or her personal best through schooling – is the amount of time spent on task with an able teacher¹.

The quality of teaching is now widely accepted as the most significant influence on school achievement, of those that are susceptible to policy action. The best contribution governments can make to our children's formal schooling is to guarantee an adequate supply of quality teachers for all their schools².

The themes of this paper arise from the belief that all our children are equal; and equally entitled to the conditions in schools most likely to enable them to participate fully and to achieve their personal best. While equal, our children are not all the same, and the circumstances in which they are being educated vary widely. Principles of equity need to be applied to deal with these differences.

Equity in education has two broad dimensions: fairness and inclusion. Fairness entails ensuring that personal and social circumstances – which are matters beyond the control or influence of children – should not be obstacles to achieving potential. Inclusion means that there should be basic minimum standards that apply to all.³

If equality and equity matter at all in schooling, then they matter most in relation to its most significant element – quality teaching. The entitlement to a good teacher derives from students'

¹ Darling-Hammond, L. 1997. *The Right to Learn: A Blueprint for Creating Schools that Work*

² McKinsey & Company. 2008. *How the world's best-performing school systems come out on top*; Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development. 2005. *Teachers Matter: Attracting, Developing and Retaining Effective Teachers*; Business Council of Australia (BCA), *Teaching Talent: The best teachers for Australia's Classrooms* (2008).

³ OECD. 2007. *No More Failures: The Steps to Equity in Education*.

shared humanity; from universal human rights and the requirements of democratic citizenship. These values are backed by persuasive evidence that it is also in our economic interests not to treat a high quality education as the prerogative of the favoured few.

So, it will not be enough for governments simply to ensure an adequate supply of quality teachers overall. Access to them must be such as to give all our children a fair go and a fair share.

This is a tall order, especially in societies like ours, where schooling serves a range of disparate purposes. Governments' attempts to accommodate these in policy frameworks can result in countervailing policies.

Schooling is an arena for intense competition, where groups and individuals vie for influence over policy and priorities for their preferred ends. This competition and public policy responses to it in Australia have produced some significant shifts over recent decades. There has been a significant shift, for example, in the balance of public funding between the two sectors, public and private⁴. This has been accompanied by a (less) significant shift in the balance of student enrolments towards the private sector and within that sector, to independent schools. This enrolment shift has, in turn, entailed an increase in the proportion of teachers working in the non-government school sector. The net effect has been that while students and teachers have been shifting into the private sector, the salary bill for those teachers has been moving in the opposite direction – right back to government and to the public purse.

What this means is that the responsibility for the supply of qualified teachers for the whole school system in Australia, public and private schools, and for their remuneration, now rests almost entirely with governments. Grants to the private school sector from both Commonwealth and State governments now exceed the private sector's salary bill; while the Commonwealth also has responsibility for providing the public funds for the universities which provide initial teacher education.

It was through the public school sector that governments previously exercised their responsibility for allocating publicly-funded teachers. But, as the public school sector is contracting, they are now ceding this responsibility to private school authorities. And a growing proportion of the publicly-funded teachers in Australia now works in the schools where access to their services is restricted by upfront fees and other privately set admission criteria.

The divide between the public and private school sectors has never been a simple one. Competition associated with social class and socio-economic differences flourish within each sector, as well as between. We often hear the specious claim that, since public and private providers of schooling all receive a mix of public and private funding, this means that the public-private divide is no longer a meaningful distinction. It means no such thing. What this means is that the distinction between public and private providers of education is far more complex than previously and that even more careful analysis of evidence is needed to drive rational and sustainable policy.

There are numerous authoritative accounts of the decisions taken in the past for a mix of educational, political and demographic reasons that have led to our hybrid school system⁵. It is

⁴ According to the OECD *Handbook for Internationally Comparative Education Statistics* (OECD), "an institution is classified as public if ultimate control rests with (1) a public education authority or agency or, (2) a governing body (Council, Committee etc.), most of whose members are appointed by a public authority or elected by public franchise. An institution is classified as private if ultimate control rests with a non-governmental organisation (e.g. a Church, Trade Union or business enterprise), or if its Governing Board consists mostly of members not selected by a public agency.

⁵ Caldwell, B J; Dettman, P; Harris, J.; Selleck, RJW; and Wilkinson, IR: *A History of State Aid to Non-Government Schools in Australia*. A project funded by the Department of Education, Science and Training 2006; Watson L., (1998) *Intentions, Opportunities and Outcomes. The Impact of Commonwealth Involvement in Australian Schooling*. Unpublished PhD thesis, Australian National University; Preston B.

important that we understand them, because we cannot move on to a better future by ignoring or denying the past. The trouble with the past is that if you don't understand it, its problems will carry on into the future.

Australia's schools now operate in a social, educational and funding framework as unique to Australia as the platypus.

Until the 1970s, public schools had co-existed for almost a century with a private school sector mainly comprised of Catholic schools. These were largely staffed by teachers belonging to religious orders who contributed their teaching services. Their contribution made this form of community-based, private schooling affordable to many Catholic families. In their local communities, such schools served a significant and predictable minority (ie the Catholic share) of the school population, including many from poorer families. With the sudden and unpredicted disappearance of the teaching nuns and brothers and government responses to it, the situation changed radically. Today, public schools operate alongside private schools that are free to combine high levels of public funding with unregulated private fees. Today's private schools draw a significant and growing share of the total student population in an unplanned and unpredictable way, apart from the fact that their overall share is drawn disproportionately from higher income families.

How is this radical change going to affect equity of access to quality teaching?

I confided recently to one of my daughters that I was worried about this paper – that I was worried about asking questions to which I had no clear answer and which, in turn, raised concerns that I did not feel were fully understood by me or anyone else; and that, even if they were, would be too difficult to deal with in a twenty minute paper. She gave me some helpful advice. She informed me that there was now a genre of paper in academic circles known as 'a provocation'. I am not sure that I fully understand that notion either, but I think this paper, from here on, is some kind of 'provocation'.

I want to provoke action in the form of a long, hard look at educational and social aspects of our policy and funding frameworks for schooling through the prism of equity of access to quality teaching. We need to move past a fixation with dollars and to fix instead on quality teaching. Dollars are not an end in themselves, not that one would always understand that from the tenor of much discourse about schooling in this country. Those dollars are the financial means to an educational end.

When funding for schools gets up to \$millions, let alone \$billions, it is hard to envisage such vast sums and to get our minds around the questions we need to be asking. We need to make these figures more educationally meaningful and readily comprehensible...like we do with, say, water usage. In Australia the size of many bodies of water are referenced back to the size of Sydney Harbour, so we hear annual gigalitres of water usage described in terms of how many Sydharbs this represents.

Referencing recurrent funding for schools back, say, to average teacher salaries, would change the nature of policy discourse away from political and towards social and educational realities. We could begin a rational debate about the questions of who decides where those teacher salaries go. We could ask whether it is the business of governments to develop frameworks to govern the distribution of the teachers (the bulk of whose salaries they now provide) among students and schools. Or whether the distribution of those teachers should be left to market forces? We could refer to evidence of how patterns of public investment over the past decades, described by previous speakers, have translated directly or indirectly into quality teaching in schools? How many and what schools have gained most teachers from funding increases? We could ask whether some of the funding that could have been spent on quality teaching has been

diverted to other purposes? And who has decided? We could extend the work undertaken through the MCEETYA Schools Resourcing Taskforce, to develop resource standards and to provide an informed basis for making decisions about the teachers needed in our schools to ensure that we have an efficient, effective and equitable school system, capable of achieving national goals.

This paper can only scratch the surface of the questions that need to be asked about equity of access to quality teaching.

When we are ready to start asking those questions, then the first thing to be said is that no one can be included or share fairly in what is not there in the first place. An adequate supply of teachers and measures for guaranteeing the quality of teaching are pre-conditions for equity.⁶

Teacher supply and demand. The question 'How many teachers do we need?' is fundamentally a question about what we want our children to learn and the value we attach to the entitlement of all our children to learn. And the answer is that we need enough teachers for every school in Australia to implement the agreed curriculum for the particular students it serves.

In relation to teacher supply, we face the challenge of replacing an exodus of retiring teachers - which is occurring internationally; on top of persisting forms of teacher shortage, in geographical and in specific subject areas.

Predicting how many teachers will be needed to staff Australia's schools and whether we will have sufficient is far harder than it seems. Will the rising fertility rate continue, or are we seeing a blip in an underlying pattern of decline in the student population? And how will it be affected through changes to immigration policy? Even if school authorities had a crystal ball to answer these questions, they would still be dealing with increases and declines being unevenly spread throughout the country creating local problems with supply and demand. Student retention rates, class size decisions, patterns of interstate migration, add further complexity. So do changes in the economy and the broader labour market; changes to superannuation policies affecting retirement decisions; different models of initial teacher education; and applications of technology to teaching and learning.

These challenges, which are not unique to Australia, are compounded by factors which are: dysfunctional splits in responsibilities between the Commonwealth, States and private school authorities in Australia's federal system for the planning, funding and operation of schools and of teacher education.

Within the policy and funding frameworks that have prevailed since the 1970s, the balance of enrolments has, broadly speaking, been shifting progressively away from public systemic and into private, non-systemic, 'independent' schools. This has implications for teacher supply, to be explored later in this paper.

⁶ For further information and discussion on teacher supply and demand, refer to Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) in collaboration with the Australian College of Educators (ACE). *Staff in Australia's Schools 2007*; Owen, S; Kos, J; McKenzie, P. *Teacher Workforce Data and Planning Processes in Australia*. Report prepared for DEEWR by Australian College of Educators and Australian Council for Educational Research. 2008.

It may be that the ill wind of the global financial crash will blow qualified teachers back into schools and increase the attractiveness of the profession to new entrants, averting risks of shortage. But we would be wise to err on the side of caution and to put increased effort into teacher recruitment. After all, school teaching is a mass profession (ie we need lots of teachers); we are not the only country in the world dealing with large retirements rates from our schools; schools will be competing with the early childhood and higher education sectors for teachers in this country; and we have persisting areas of shortage – in such significant areas as science and mathematics. Given the educational aspirations of individuals and the nation as a whole, my sense is that we will never have sufficient teachers to match them, and will have to settle for the numbers we are able and willing to pay for, through our taxes.

In relation to teacher supply, public policy took a great leap forward when the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) agreed to develop a strategic framework for a national approach to workforce planning for schools. This happened as recently as 2007, and after more than a decade of alarm and denial about the likelihood of shortage resulting from the accelerating rate of retirements.

Teacher quality. Significant improvements to the policy framework have also been made in relation to the quality of teaching. I refer, in particular, to the establishment of bodies such as the NSW Institute of Teachers and similar bodies in other states, as well as Teaching Australia.

Developing the quality of teaching requires partnerships between universities and schools, teacher educators and practising teachers, starting from initial, pre-service teacher education, through all the stages of a teacher's career. There are signs, however, that the work of growing quality teachers is not being shared equally among schools. Data gathered several years ago in a survey by the NSW Department of Education and Training showed that, of the total of 13,392 student teachers for whom universities made practice placements in schools in 2005, 11,383 or 85 per cent were in public schools. This meant that the public school system was taking responsibility for teachers' pre-service professional experience at a level well beyond its sector share.

There have been anecdotal reports, over years, of independent schools inviting promising trainee teachers to come back and apply for a position only after spending a few years in public schools to gain experience. There is also evidence of schools in the higher fee end of the independent school sector using their superior financial muscle to recruit experienced and accomplished teachers at the expense of other schools. It would be hard to establish just how widespread such practices are. But it is not hard to see the world of difference between developing teacher quality and simply cannibalising the existing supply of accomplished and experienced teachers.

What of access to quality teaching, the issue of how teachers are distributed among schools?

Around the world, powerful underlying market forces affect this distribution. Their basic feature is that schools, whether public or private, with students drawn from relatively well-off families, are the best-placed to attract teachers. Even these will feel the pinch if there is a teacher shortage overall or in particular curriculum areas. And privilege can go too far. Some years ago, I observed the difficulties faced by schools in privileged enclaves in New York. These areas were just too expensive for those on teacher salaries to live in or travel to.

At the other end of the spectrum, schools in areas where few professionals choose to live will tend to be harder to staff; and there will be a tendency for children from well-off families in such areas to be sent outside the area to be taught – even to boarding schools. These general underlying trends are then complicated by various local factors.

Teese has described the broad way in which these market forces affect the distribution of teachers in Australia. He describes them working as a transfer system by which teachers are

sent to the hardest to staff schools to begin their teaching careers and then, as they become more experienced, gravitate to other schools⁷.

Governments do not simply yield to these forces. They respond to them through their various policy and funding frameworks. As I will attempt briefly to illustrate, however, these frameworks are now sufficiently elastic and pliable to accommodate contradictory values and principles and to legitimise contrary practices.

How does public policy work to affect the distribution of teachers among schools? The matter of equity

Let us start with public school systems. There is much that could be said about the importance to society of a strong and socially representative, secular, public school system open to all. The point that is central here is that, in Australia, such systems were for many years the means for governments to share out the teachers they provide, in a rational and fair way.

This has always been a complex task and it would be unsurprising if it was always done perfectly. As a graduate of the NSW public school system, I have to admit that, since I was a girl, the anomalies and perversities that its staffing procedures could produce were an occasional source of mirth. Now that I have grown up, however, I understand more clearly the nature and purpose of the system's staffing formula and related arrangements. They are a complex web of procedures for mediating competing interests. They are an ongoing attempt to balance the entitlement of all the State's students to be taught effectively with aspirations of parents in individual schools serving vastly different communities; the desires of principals (especially those in better-off areas) for autonomy and flexibility in staffing their own domains to advantage; and the legitimate employment and career interests of teachers.

In public school systems, the principle of inclusion is built into staffing formulae that deliver a basic minimum standard of staffing to all; or in funding formulae that represent schools' entitlement to teachers. What this means is that every school gets, as its basic staffing, at least the ratio of teachers provided for the schools that serve the best off and most able students in the system. Then the principle of fairness comes into play as schools receive differential staffing to deal with the specific students they serve and the circumstances in which they are required to operate.

Demographic planning of schools is another aspect of the policy framework governing public school systems in Australia, to ensure that school places are rationally distributed among the school population. This is, in essence, a recognition of the need to marshal the available resources in the cause of teaching, rather than on maintaining an excessive number of schools.

By contrast, governments largely waive any considerations of demographic planning when it comes to funding teachers for schools in the private sector. The NSW Government, for example, in responding to the *Review of Non-government Schools Funding in NSW* (Grimshaw, 2002) actively rejected the need for demographic demand for school places to be taken into account in its criteria for the establishment or expansion of non-government schools or for the provision of its public funding for those places. Freedom from regulation fitted well with Commonwealth policy frameworks promoting competition and choice, so no objection was forthcoming from that quarter.

Within Catholic systems, which cater for around two-thirds of all students in the private school sector, roughly parallel arrangements apply for distributing teachers among schools as in the public sector, maintaining a minimum standard for all schools with further staffing being provided on a differential basis to meet educational needs. Catholic system authorities also engage in their own, internal, demographic planning, in the interests of the economic operation of their own system overall. The relative efficiency of Catholic systems in staffing their schools – achieving a student-teacher ratio of 15.1 nationally – is made possible largely by the fact that private providers

⁷ Teese R. 2006. 'Condemned to innovate'. *Griffith Review*, Edition 11 – Getting Smart: The battle for ideas in education

of schooling have control of their student intake and do not share the legal obligation of governments to establish schools in high-cost rural and remote areas; or to keep schools open in particular localities, even enrolments fall to uneconomic levels.

Teachers are not evenly distributed across sectors. Whereas public systems, in 2006, employed one teacher for every 14.3 students, one teacher in the independent schools sector was available for every 12.1 students. This was despite the fact that public schools cater for a disproportionately high, and independent schools for a disproportionately low, share of those students requiring more intensive teaching. Australia would have needed an additional 40,000 teachers in 2006, an increase of some 17 per cent over the current teaching force, if all schools were staffed as generously as the 11 per cent of schools that comprised the private, independent sector.

We know that this is the fastest growing area of the school sector. We know also that by 2004, the Commonwealth's general recurrent funding for the new quadrennium (\$7.6 billion) to independent non-government schools alone, enrolling roughly 13 per cent of students nationally, outstripped that provided for the public school sector (\$7.2 billion) with five times that enrolment.

Few if any examples can be found, however, of mechanisms for applying principles of equity in the distribution of teachers among the variety of schools that constitute the independent school sector. Their differentiated general recurrent grants provided by governments do not mitigate the effects of their huge variations in private fees and wealth. Small classes exist at one end of the sector because high parental fees provide the wherewithal to employ more teachers and to provide them with superior remuneration and conditions than most other schools. These are the kinds of school that have already been able to afford to put in place industrial agreements that use the new accreditation standards, such as those developed by the Institute of Teachers in NSW, as a framework for salary increases designed to attract, retain and reward teachers.

What all this means is that, when a publicly funded teacher is employed in the independent schools sector, that teacher, on average, will be teaching fewer students than in either a public school or in a systemic Catholic school; the students they are teaching will be drawn from a higher socio-economic background; and they are more likely to be teaching in a locality where school places are in over-supply, relative to the population.

In considering our schools policy and funding framework from a social and educational standpoint, I can see some grounds for fear.

An increasing proportion of parents in Australia is now paying privately towards the cost of their children's schooling. What they are paying varies widely in scale and as a proportion of their disposable incomes. What will be the overall effect of this change on overall equity of access to quality teaching?

Ian McAuley in a recent issue of *Dissent* recounts an experiment that may be relevant here⁸

Two researchers, sceptical of the conventional wisdom of lawyers and economists, conducted a controlled experiment in ten day-care centres in Haifa, Israel. Up to the time of the experiment there had been no fine for a late pick-up of children. The experimenters introduced a fine of ten shekels (the equivalent of around \$A8.00) on parents who were late by ten minutes or more. Contrary to conventional wisdom that this would improve parents' punctuality, the incidence of late pick-up actually worsened. In the minds of the parents, the fine had become a price for a late pickup. There was now a 'market' for late pickups. A ten shekel price proved easier to bear than the guilt and social disapproval of causing inconvenience to the day care staff.

It is possible that an increase in the proportion of parents paying fees of whatever size for their children's schooling may work against a general willingness to engage in the principles of the 'fair go' and the 'fair share' in relation to the distribution of teachers among schools. Even though

⁸ McAuley I. Behaving ourselves in the marketplace. *Dissent*. Summer 2006/2007.

these fees bear little or no relation to meeting the costs of those teachers, the mere fact of paying a fee may obviate all sense of mutual obligation, in this case, to each others' children; let alone guilt.

Increasing public recurrent funding is being provided all sectors, with potential to improve the supply and raise the quality of teaching overall. But there are significant differences between the sectors in relation to their spending priorities.

In the public sector, the responsibility for shifting funds can be sheeted home to the relevant public authority. In the private sector, however, it would be quite possible for recurrent funding increases from governments to be used to release private funding for other purposes. A school authority in receipt of funding increases could simply maintain the same number of teachers or expenditure on professional development, for example, and use the opportunity to re-direct private funding to other purposes. These could include diverting the private funds into building up private capital facilities, or inflating remuneration packages for principals and executive staff. The potential is there for this to happen, a potential which did not exist to anything like the same extent under the previous Commonwealth scheme.

According to the latest Annual National Report on Schooling (2006, Table 20) average annual public spending per student on capital was \$659; compared with \$1,186 (almost twice as much) for Catholic schools and \$2,431 (almost four times) as much) for independent schools. As reported in the previous paper by McMorrow, expenditure in non-government schools on capital costs, at 15% of their total expenditure, is significantly more than the 6% for government schools. And while teacher salaries are the largest expenditure item for both public and private sectors, 56% is spent on these in public schools and around 45% in private.

I am not arguing that this level of investment in buildings and facilities is, in itself, excessive or a bad thing from an educational or a social standpoint. Spending twice what was being spent in 2006 on buildings and facilities in government schools is not saying much. There is a small number of private schools with capital facilities that could be described as extravagant from an educational standpoint, but I am leaving these aside.

But these figures suggest that the fact that governments are now picking up the tab for almost all teachers in Australian schools has enabled private school authorities to invest their private income in higher quality capital resources – which are almost certainly a factor in market place competition among schools.

The key purpose of providing recurrent grants to schools is, or should be to raise the supply and quality of teaching overall. Whether public funds should be used to effect, indirectly, a build-up of private school facilities; or, alternatively, whether the greater priority is to raise the supply and quality of teaching specifically in those schools where high quality teachers are most needed? This kind of decision ought surely be a matter of explicit public policy, to be made in the public interest, against defensible criteria.

There are those who will argue that there is nothing wrong with leaving market forces to share out teachers; and that governments are there to intervene only if and when the market fails and harm results.

Others will argue that we all understand that public policy is built around compromise, so that we can move forward and get things done.

It can certainly be argued that, even if our policy framework for distributing teachers does foster practices and produce effects here and there that are inconsistent with principles of equity, these are not the norm; and that equity principles guide action across the bulk of our school system, even if imperfectly.

The problem I want to raise in this paper is that none of us really knows at what point any such inequitable practices do start to affect the system as a whole. It seems to be prudent not to wait

to find out. We need to remember that when we speak of quality teaching we are speaking about what lies right at the heart of successful schooling – not about some side effect or social trapping.

I am not being alarmist or arguing that our school system is in crisis, although there are individual schools in crisis through no fault of their own communities. The seeds of crisis are ever present, however, in a society becoming increasingly socio-economically stratified. It will be hard to preserve a school system that does not reflect this stratification even if we had a policy and funding framework dedicated to doing so, and harder still to do so with our confused hybrid.

Is there not something very worrying about a situation that is upon us already? A recent study on the future of Australia's primary schools has revealed that their capacity to respond to mandated curriculum priorities beyond literacy and numeracy is highly variable. This variability is largely due to difficulties in recruiting teachers with the requisite expertise in teaching, most notably in areas such as languages other than English and the arts⁹. There are also serious shortages of teachers of mathematic, science and ICT teachers, affecting most seriously students in rural and remote areas¹⁰. Governments are about to introduce national reporting on the performance of schools. While we can applaud greater transparency about schools' performance, students are being assessed in some schools where they have not had the benefit of qualified teachers – in both primary and high schools. Assurances that their performance will only be compared with other 'like schools' (presumably other schools with an equivalent lack of qualified teachers) seems to be cold comfort, educationally speaking.

We had, in the recent past, a Federal Minister for Education who liked to refer to teachers as 'a precious national resource'. The fact that this rhetoric produced relatively little for public schools does not diminish the value of this metaphor. If teaching is a precious national resource such as, say, the water in the Murray-Darling system, then we should be guarding against waste, against the diversion of the supply unplanned pools, reservoirs and channels before it reaches where it is most needed. If teaching were our precious national fish stocks, say, we need to be careful that we are not shrinking the lake where they breed while allowing those outside with big nets to take an unlimited catch. Or, if teaching is the blood supply of our education system, we need to be sure that it is not being used up on unnecessary cosmetic surgery for those who can pay privately towards it.

If current policy settings continue, my fear is that the capacity of the public system itself to provide the conditions and the incentives necessary to staff such schools with quality teachers will be undermined; and that will undermine the capacity of the school system overall to achieve national goals.

That is the worst that could happen.

But there are also some very real grounds for hope and optimism.

⁹ *In the Balance: The Future of Australia's primary schools is the report of an investigation into the state of Australian primary schooling, based mainly on evidence provided by staff from a random sample of 160 primary schools.*

http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/school_education/publications_resources/profiles/in_the_balance_the_future_of_australias_primary_schools.htm

¹⁰ National Centre of Science, ICT and Mathematics Education for Rural and Regional Australia, University of New England. (2006). *Science, ICT and Mathematics Education in Rural and Regional Australia. The SiMERR National Survey. A research report prepared for the Department of Education, Science and Training.* <http://simerr.une.edu.au/nationalsurvey/index.html>

As behavioural economists now tell us, we are not as universally driven by self-interest as conventional economics would have it. In the real world, the concept of the 'fair go' and the 'fair share' is alive and well¹¹.

We do have much research evidence that altruism is a key motivation for choosing teaching as a career. And we have evidence also that there are many teachers who seek to work in challenging schools in troubled communities, to take on the task of teaching English to those for whom it is a second language; and those with a range of behavioural and intellectual disabilities. Where they have the conditions necessary to deal with these challenges, these teachers drive forward the frontiers of professional knowledge and inclusive practice.

There are certainly initiatives, recent policy decisions, that also give rise to hopes in contrast to fears. Improving the quality of teaching was identified as one of the 'central pillars' of the COAG reform agenda by the Prime Minister, along with lifting achievement in disadvantaged school communities. And action has now begun in the form of the recent National Education Agreement ratified through COAG.

This brings with it increased funding for public schools, after years of policy indifference by the Commonwealth, which includes \$550 million over five years for attracting, training, developing and retaining quality teachers and leaders in schools.

The largest tranche within the COAG package is the Commonwealth's contribution of \$1.1 billion over five years for schools with concentrations of students of low SES background, with a further 400 million to be provided over the following two years, a total of \$1.5 billion over seven years. This funding will be subject to States developing implementation plans on reforms for identified schools, to include incentives to attract high-performing teachers and principals, 'best-practice performance management and staffing arrangements', innovation, strengthened accountability and building external partnerships¹². These welcome initiatives will, of course, work most effectively if they are implemented with the benefit of the support of educators and those with demonstrated expertise, based on the best available evidence.

The Bradley Review of Australian Higher Education¹³ identified shortfalls in Australia's education performance that can be traced back to family circumstances where greater support is needed, through early childhood education and care to schooling and beyond.

The Rudd Government has already committed to a range of measures to give families better access to high quality, nationally consistent early childhood education and care. These include \$970 million over five years to provide all Australian children with access to 15 hours a week of early learning programs for 40 weeks a year in the year prior to formal schooling; and \$292.6 million over six years on 35 Children and Family Centres that will provide a mix of services that are responsive to community needs, and include child care, early learning and parent and family support services.

The Commonwealth Government has now accepted the arguments set out in the Bradley Review of Higher Education for expanding participation in higher education. In doing this, it has acknowledged the action that will be needed to make sure that students drawn from a broader social spectrum reach the starting gate for higher education and other post-school education and training.

As the previous (McMorrow) paper has demonstrated, the recent COAG funding has done little to change the basic funding map in this country. But just as we are right to fear the 'multiplier' effects of negative practices across the system as a whole, so we are right to base hopes on the similar effects of constructive initiatives and investments of this scale.

¹¹ McAuley I. op.cit

¹² McMorrow J. 2008. *Updating the evidence: the Rudd Government's intentions for schools*.

¹³ www.deewr.gov.au/he_review/fiinalreport

There is a very real potential for these recent commitments to be brought together in powerful and strategic ways to achieve reforms that are really needed; and for those changes to strengthen the system as a whole. These new initiatives could coalesce to provide the very conditions in schools serving the most disadvantaged communities that we know, from experience and research, can attract, develop and retain experienced teachers. Through university-school partnerships, these schools could be developed into sites for professional development of teachers for the school system as a whole. For this to happen they would need to be provided with the resource flexibility to develop a stable leadership team, capable of providing on-site learning for fledgling teachers¹⁴. Other conditions identified by Teese¹⁵ as necessary for such schools to flourish include: having a good mix of students, decent physical fabric and freedom from the predatory behaviour of over-funded selective establishments.

Australian governments hold such contradictory principles regarding equity of access to quality teaching that that it strains credulity to label them a policy framework. But, framework of not, there is potential within our policy and funding arrangements both to improve and to worsen an already uneven playing field. I want to end by arguing that it does not matter that we lack a crystal ball to tell us how fast we are heading in one direction or another.

What is sufficiently clear is that governments in Australia have largely taken over responsibility for the supply, quality and remuneration of school teachers. Does it matter that they do not have a coherent, regulatory framework for discharging this responsibility in a rational and fair way?

I believe that it does. Providing high quality teaching for all our children and young people, the key to successful schooling, is surely too great an enterprise to be given over to political convenience and opportunism or relegated to market forces.

What we need to do is to look long and hard at the policy and funding framework that we have created.

The best thing we can do, in the light of the educational evidence available to us is to undertake a fundamental reform of national schools funding arrangements through an open review process. We need to achieve nationally consistent arrangements for schools funding that are specifically designed to sustain the supply and quality of our teaching force and to distribute publicly funded teachers and the public funds for the employment of teachers on the basis of resource standards grounded in the best available evidence. Unless this happens, we will not reach national goals, nor reap the full benefits of the effort being invested in national curriculum or the reform of higher education.

In relation to the entitlement of all our young people to quality teachers in their schools, we need to contemplate where we are now in terms of policy and funding arrangements and then to consider the worst that can happen and the best that can happen. And we then need to be prepared to stand up and to fight for the best.

¹⁴ See the strategies recommended in Connors, L: 2007. *Time and tide...a report on the need to invest in the renewal of the public school teaching service.*

¹⁵ <http://www.theage.com.au/opinion/refocusing-on-schools-in-need-20080903-48vb.html?skin=text-only>